CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1.   A method for encoding digital information, comprising the computer-implemented steps of:

capturing media program information to produce a media program file;

receiving an encoding request from a client, wherein the encoding request requests that the media program information be encoded in one or more encoding formats;

selecting a set of encoding engines that can encode the media program information in each of the one or more encoding formats;

sending the media program file to the selected set of encoding engines; and

using said selected set of encoding engines to encode said media program information in said one or more encoding formats.

2.   The method as recited in claim 1, wherein:

the step of capturing comprises the step of reading the media program information from a storage medium;

the method further includes the steps of associating the media program file with a unique Master_ID.

3.   The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the step of receiving an encoding request from a client comprises the steps of:

causing a user interface to be displayed at the client, wherein the user interface allows users to enter encoding requests; and

in response to a user interacting with said interface, receiving at a server an encoding request, wherein the encoding request includes said unique Master_ID.

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4. The method as recited in claim 3, wherein the step of receiving at a server an encoding request further comprises the step of receiving a set of encoding parameters, wherein the set of encoding parameters specify how the media program information should be encoded in each of said one or more encoding formats.

5. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising using a distribution unit to perform the steps of:
identifying an encoding order as a pending job order that needs to be processed;
identifying one or more encoding units that are available to process the pending job order;
distributing the pending job order to the one or more encoding units;
receiving an encoded data file from each of the one or more encoding units; and
storing each of the encoded data files into a storage unit for subsequent delivery to one or more customers.

6. The method as recited in claim 3, wherein the step of receiving at a server an encoding request further includes the steps of:
generating an encoding order based on the encoding request;
determining a unique Job_ID, wherein the unique Job_ID is associated with the encoding order; and
storing as a pending job order in an accessible storage unit, the encoding order and its association with the unique Job_ID.

7. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein:
the encoding request requests that the media program information be encoded in a plurality of encoding formats;

4 the step of selecting a set of encoding engines includes the step of selecting a set

5 of encoding engines that can encode the media program information in the

6 plurality of encoding formats; and

7 the step of using said selected set of encoding engines includes the step of using

8 said selected set of encoding engines to encode said media program

9 information in said plurality of encoding formats in parallel.

1 8. A computer-readable medium carrying one or more sequences of instructions for

2 encoding digital information, wherein execution of the one or more sequences of

3 instructions by one or more processors causes the one or more processors to

4 perform the steps of:

5 capturing media program information to produce a media program file;

6 receiving an encoding request from a client, wherein the encoding request

7 requests that the media program information be encoded in one or more

8 encoding formats;

9 selecting a set of encoding engines that can encode the media program

10 information in each of the one or more encoding formats;

11 sending the media program file to the selected set of encoding engines; and

12 using said selected set of encoding engines to encode said media program

13 information in said one or more encoding formats.

1 9. The computer-readable medium as recited in claim 8, wherein:

2 the step of capturing comprises the step of reading the media program information

3 from a storage medium;

4 the computer-readable medium further comprising instructions for performing the

5 steps of associating the media program file with a unique Master_ID.

1 10. The computer-readable medium as recited in claim 9, wherein the step of

2 receiving an encoding request from a client comprises the steps of:

3   causing a user interface to be displayed at the client, wherein the user interface

4   allows users to enter encoding requests; and

5   in response to a user interacting with said interface, receiving at a server an

6   encoding request, wherein the encoding request includes said unique

7   Master_ID.

1   11.   The computer-readable medium as recited in claim 10, wherein the step of

2   receiving at a server an encoding request further comprises the step of receiving a

3   set of encoding parameters, wherein the set of encoding parameters specify how

4   the media program information should be encoded in each of said one or more

5   encoding formats.

1   12.   The computer-readable medium as recited in claim 8, further

2   comprising using a distribution unit to perform the steps of:

3   identifying an encoding order as a pending job order that needs to be processed;

4   identifying one or more encoding units that are available to process the pending

5   job order;

6   distributing the pending job order to the one or more encoding units;

7   receiving an encoded data file from each of the one or more encoding units; and

8   storing each of the encoded data files into a storage unit for subsequent delivery to

9   one or more customers.

1   13.   The computer-readable medium as recited in claim 10, wherein the step of

2   receiving at a server an encoding request further includes the steps of:

3   generating an encoding order based on the encoding request;

4   determining a unique Job_ID, wherein the unique Job_ID is associated with the

5   encoding order; and

6   storing as a pending job order in an accessible storage unit, the encoding order

7   and its association with the unique Job_ID.

1   14.   The computer-readable medium as recited in claim 8, wherein:

2   the encoding request requests that the media program information be encoded in a

3   plurality of encoding formats;

4   the step of selecting a set of encoding engines includes the step of selecting a set

5   of encoding engines that can encode the media program information in the

6   plurality of encoding formats; and

7   the step of using said selected set of encoding engines includes the step of using

8   said selected set of encoding engines to encode said media program

9   information in said plurality of encoding formats in parallel.

1   15.   A system for encoding digital information, the system comprising:

2   a capturing unit that is capable of capturing media program information from a

3   storage medium;

4   a storage unit that maintains captured media program information, program

5   metadata that is based on the media program information, and encoding

6   request information, wherein each encoding request identifies a set of one

7   or more encoding formats that are to be used to encode a particular media

8   program;

9   a server connected to said storage unit, wherein the server is configured to receive

10   encoding requests from clients that are connected to said server and to

11   generate and store pending encoding orders in said storage unit based on

12   said encoding requests;

13   a distribution unit that is configured to retrieve pending job orders from said

14   storage unit and to distribute the orders to one or more encoding units;

15   wherein the encoding units are configured to encode in parallel job orders that

16   request a specific media program to be encoded in multiple encoding

17   formats.